

PLUS: STUNNING ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOP CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS

Femme Fatales

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WOMEN OF MARVEL



INSIDE: TOMB RAIDER'S JOE JUSKO, ELEKTRA'S BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS & MORE!!

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FATALE

By DAN SCAPPEROTTI

● Sandra Bullock's latest is *MURDER BY NUMBERS* directed by Béatrice Schneider who produced *SHATTERED IMAGE*, *KISS OF DEATH* and *SINGLE WHITE FEMALE*. It's a twist on Alfred Hitchcock's *ROPE*. Bullock plays Cece Maywether, a homicide detective who is investigating a series of murders. She finds herself in a cat-and-mouse game with two brilliant but deadly high school students (Ryan Gelling and Michael Pitt) who leave a clever trail of clues, thinking they have committed the perfect crime.

● Day Douglas and Another Day are continuing their Hammer Films' video release schedule with a pair of deadly fables on DVD. Marlene Dietrich, who played two bland girls in *FROM PLUS SIX WITH LOVE* and *THUNDERBALL*, is the good doctor's mysterious alter ego in *DR. JEKYLL AND SISTER HYDE*. In 1971, Hammer continued their old-school vampire tales of Camilla Kampfman began with *THE VAMPIRE LOVERS: LUST FOR A VAMPIRE* features the fuscious Swedish actress Yvonne De Carlo as the Marcella/Camilla bloodsucker.

● Actress-author Linda Parker has had several encounters with onscreen demons. In 1966, the actress was the role of Angelique Bouchard Collins on the daytime vampire soap opera *DARK SHADOWS*. In 1971, she reprised the role in the theatrical version of *NIGHT*



DARK SHADOWS' beauty Linda Parker (top) has penned a new *Revenant* novel based on the daytime series. Below: Fans of Bond Girl Martine Beswick (FF 9/4/5) can find *DR. JEKYLL AND SISTER HYDE* on DVD.

OF *DARK SHADOWS*. Some 30 years later, Parker was cast as straitlaced reporter Madeline in "The Devil's Collection" episode of *KIDLICKIN*. THE NIGHT STALKER. Although she has left the role behind, Parker hasn't been out of touch with Angelique. She wrote the first novel in the *Dark Shadows* series, *Angelique's Descent*, published by Harper Collins. "I was asked to write the last book by [author] Collins," she said. "I had never written a novel before, so it was a new experience for me. I was on *DARK SHADOWS* for five years and played the witch Angelique. She was a complicated character; she could be very cruel but she had moments. She had been seduced and abandoned by Barnabas Collins." Fans of *DARK SHADOWS* loved to hate Angelique. She could be heartless, but all because her heart had been broken. Many of the fans understood her dilemmas and fell sorry for her. Others thought Barnabas was a fool to choose any other woman over her." Although Parker didn't pen the second novel, *Dreams of the Dark*, she is now working

on the third book, yet untitled, to be published by Tor Books.

● Pam Grier gets her own Video and DVD collection courtesy of New Line/CCD Entertainment. The trio of films harkens back to those exploitation films of the '70s when producer Roger Corman discovered tough women behind bars spelled box office gold. *THE BIG DOLL HOUSE*, *THE BIG BIRD CAGE*, *WOMEN IN CAGES* and *THE ARENA* are now available on DVD as well as standard VHS.

● FF 7 & open girl Jennifer Lopez hasn't been busy in the groove of late. She does the voice of Madeline in the Disney animated sequel *HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME* and stars as the Devil in the remake of the classic fantasy *THE DEVIL AND DANIEL WEBSTER*. Between breasts she also teams up with action star Jetson Chan for *THE TUXEDO*, scheduled to hit theaters in June from Dimension Pictures. When Chan, a chauvinist to a millionaire playboy puts on his employer's high tech tuxedo, he is plunged into the strange world of espionage. Lopez plays his equally inexperience partner.

● When a serial killer comes calling in *RIPPER: LETTER FROM HELL*, A.J. Cook, Emmanuelle Vaugier and Danielle Evans are on hand. The three are students in a class probing serial killers. Cook plays Molly Keller, a young woman who saw all her friends fall victim to a savagely killer several years before. Now he's apparently back. When one of their classmates is brutally murdered, the rest of the class forms a study group, believing they can profile the elusive killer. Unfortunately, he has other ideas and the students start turning up dead. Molly draws compensated to Jack the Ripper using the stab wounds on each of the victims as evidence they may have been made by the same man. There is no shortage of suspects. Beside the class itself the professor is an ex-FBI profiler who has his own personal problems with a serial killer and an odd detective, who was assigned to the initial investigation, turns up. Coincidentally, Cook, Vaugier and Evans all have featured roles in the horror film *WISHMASTER 3: BEYOND THE GATES OF HELL*.

● The six-hour miniseries based on James Gurney's epic tale of race and drosses, *DINO-TOPIA*, premieres on the ABC network this spring from Hallmark Entertainment, the company responsible for such television events as *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS* and *THE LOST KINGDOM*. The film finds strange in a very strange land, one in which humans and dinosaurs live and work side by side. In the far version, Frank Scott, adventurer and self-made millionaire takes his sons Kiel and David, a la a boy in his private plane. The plane, however, crashes into a strange wall and



the boys had themselves stranded in this lost, wild world. They take their way inland when they meet the lovely Marion Seville, played by Katie Carr, who had appeared as Nasauca in Hallmark's *THE ODYSSEY*. Their introduction is dramatic. A madcapleted emphysema is running wild, but Marion steps in front of the rampaging doctor and guests him. Marion's father is the mayor of the magnificent Westland City. Alice Krige, a veteran of such genre films as *SLEEPWALKERS*, *GHOST STORY* and *STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT* was cast as Marion's mother, Rosemary.

● *Spies and Counterespionage* is set in ENIGMA, a new espionage thriller from director Michael Apted. During World War II, using the Enigma machine, the British have broken the German secret code. After months of successfully intercepting coded messages, the Allies are surprised when suddenly the Germans change the code just as three American convoys are crossing the Atlantic. It's a race against time to save the fleets and discover why the Nazis changed the code. Can there be a spy inside the British decoding establishment? Kate Winslet

computer system, causing a momentary black-out. Suddenly, Christy, who has a problem frustrating people, is plunged into a world of doubt. Redhead Stacy Noel plays Christy's friend and agent. Ruth, who has her own fears with a doctor

•Stephanie Branton is back in THE PASSION NETWORK. The red-headed 35-year-old actress has appeared in such genre epics as EYES OF THE WEREWOLF and ZOMBIE NINJA GANGSTERS, as well as three films in the WITCHCRAFT series. Here she plays Janice, the wife of a man who gets involved with what appears to be a decadent secret society. When her husband Matt is apparently killed, Janice goes to the police with her story, told in flashback. She tells how she was lured into an organization known as "The Ring," a group dedicated to dabucherry and sex made up of the world's rich and powerful. Soon she and Matt are commodities on the international Fresh Sheeple Network, while it is difficult to become a member, it is almost impossible to get out. Secrecy must be kept. Playboy Playmate Devon DeVriesquez appears as Cleo, Matt's beautiful first client.

● We get to see a lot of lascivious Bond girl Ursula Andress in MOUNTAIN OF THE GIBBNAL GIGO, being released on DVD by Anchor Bay. Released in an edited version stateside in 1978 as SLAVES OF THE GIBBNAL GIGO, this Italian import has Andress hung up like a妓女 to help her find her missing husband. Unfortunately they run into a native tribe with a taste for human flesh. The DVD was transferred from the original cameras negative and contains scenes not available on any video or theatrical version. It also features a discussion by director Sergio Martino and the international trailer.

● Featured in each issue are VAMPIRE CO-SESSION, THE EROTIC GHOST and MIS-TRESS FRANKENSTEIN. East Coast actress Dianen Game comes face to face with another bandaged corpse in MUMMY RAIDER, a less bug-filled cross between MUMMY RETURNS and LARA CROFT: TOMB RAIDER. "It's a spoof," said Game. "I played the professor's daughter who gets caught by a band of Nazis lead by an evil woman called Doctor Humboldt. She wants to possess the supernatural powers of the mummy. Since I'm the only one who can read the inscription 'I'm taken prisoner' and get released." Fortunately, she's friends with Misty Mandee, the Mummy Raider. "My girlfriend saves me and then we all live ever after."

As expected, nutty is a prominent ingredient in her films. "The nutty is no problem at all," said Cane. "That's easy that's breakfast. I have no problem with the nutty. I absolutely enjoy it. You don't realize the camera is there because you're friends with everyone [on set]. It's almost like you're hanging out. The sex isn't real. There's nothing below the waist, your hand is there or something like that, but it's not real."

Traversing to the film's low budget origins, Cane said, "We filmed in Cape Cod at the doorway of a house. They made the garage look like a dungeon and shot all the action scenes in a

The film stars Neddy Mundee as the title character whose blazing guns add a level of deadly action to the film. Ernestina Doloresco another veteran of Selection Cinema production plays the evil Dr. Hunboldt.

Two years ago Caine launched her own website, www.danielsodecdoraincane.com. Beside the pictures, free webcams and bio info, Caine has an



James Clarkson's 1996 action flick *VICE GIRLS* has just been released on video and DVD.

on-line comic book. As an outlet for her writing urges, Game pens stories for her comic, "Gigasam's Erotic Vampire Tales". "I wrote a story about how I seduce women and turn them over to the dark side," she said.

■Lara Clarkson (BARBARIAN QUEEN) joins Kimberly Roberts and Lori Goodwin in the re-released and re-scored actioner *VICE GIRLS* (1996). Directed by Richard Gabai (*ASSAULT OF THE PARTY MERD*) and co-starring A Michael Baldwin (*PHANTASM*), the flick finds the ladies as sexy detectives on the trail of a serial killer.

●When it comes to pop art, painter Ivan Bonci gives a unique spin to his paintings, creating realistic images with a supernatural feel. Bonci has taken a selection of his artwork from the last five years and compiled them into a new book entitled *The Art of Ivan Bonci*. "I have a photo-realistic approach to the paintings," he explained. "It takes about 300 hours to paint one of these pictures. I do about 75% painting and 25% brush to smudge out the brush strokes. The girls who pose for me are all strippers and models. I take photographs as a reference. I use that as a guide and then I paint the picture freehand."

"I have the models come and pose for the photo references," said Boinb. "It's cool to have pictures of the naked chicks, but once you sit



Obituary Formanek
See Obituaries KILLJOY 2 and
HELL ASYLUM Iris
Spring.

down to paint the girl, it's nice to do something extra that wasn't there in my studio, something out of my imagination. What's the point of painting what was there? You're just rendering the photograph in your head. Why not go even further with it?

One of the most striking images in the book is a 1929 painting entitled 'The Hunger' that features a pair of fanged flesheaters. 'They're vampires, said Bomb. 'The one on top is B-movie actress Dallas Clare. The other is Victoria Vega, who has since resigned from the B-movie girl-gift type of thing. The vampire theme is a big one for me. There's something erotic about the teeth and the blood. I use wood panel for most of these paintings because if I go too dark I can always remove paint with sandpaper or a scraping tool and not damage the surface.'

For his bondage opus, 'Lady Kayla II, The Punishment', Duo Bomb used notorious New York dominatrix Lady Kayla as his model. She was on HBO's special *FETISHES: THE MISTRESSES OF PANDORA'S BOX*. Bomb decided to document the creation of this painting for himself and produced a video, a making-of documentary he called ST. MARY'S SCHOOLHOUSE: SLUTS. The video turned into something else. 'It just dawned on me, why not do a video and show the behind-the-scenes of how these paintings are created,' he said. After the film was produced, it earned offshoot *POV* (pretty much cut out the footage of me painting and focused on the girl and it ended up becoming an entertainment video. I mailed some

advocates to several Pay Per View networks and they were picked up by In Demand Pay Per View and Action Pay Per View.'

The artist also has his own website, www.nastyart.com, which features his work and edibles.

• What has Doan Cain been up to since he hung up his *Supernova* cape? Well, he's become a big time thief. Cain plays Max Hooper, an ex-con hired to lift a top secret VR chip in *FIREFTRAP*. Getting into the high rise office building was the easy part; getting out proves much difficult when a saboteur out to snag the chip for himself sets the building on fire. Trapped on the upper floors along with Cain are TANK GIRL's Lise Petty and McHornie (TV's *Daybreak*)! Hama plays the CEO's wife and, to complicate matters, Petty is having an affair with her husband, British model-turned-actor, *Vanessa Angel*! Patti Hooper's wife, *Angie* (FF 3, 9.7) appeared as Megan on *RAYWITCH*, as well as *STARSGATE SG-1*, *TIME TRAXX* and *REAGONVILLE DOUBTS*. She will also be featured in the upcoming *SABRETOOTH*.

• Penithouse's *SWEETHEART MURDERS* is packed with B-movie chicks including Gabriella Hall, Linda Hall, Monique Parent and Tami McClure, who played Reese Witherspoon's mother in *LEGALLY BLONDE*. A killer is loose among Los Angeles' high fashion models. A video called 'American Sweethearts' seems to provide the killing ground for the larvae. The larvae are found nude with a red scarf around their necks and a copy of the video playing on their VCRs.

• Jennifer Rubin (PF 4.6), best known for her teen angst role of "Tara" in *ANORKEWAE ON ELM STREET 3* (1987), signs up for the sword

and sandal brigade in *AWARDONS AND GLADIATORS*, another Xena-inspired women warrior epic. Sensors, a slave girl whose parents were killed by the Romans, ends up in chains and finally in the infamous arena. Newcomer Nicole Holt, who recently appeared in *SHALLOW HAL*, plays Sensors.

• Super *Female* Denise Duff (PF 2.2, 2.4, 8.2) has jumped from her neck biting antics in three of the *BUBBIEPIES* hits to a regular gig on the daytime soap *THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS*. Duff portrays Amelinda, an earth mother whose daughter, Mackenzie, ran away two years ago. Amelinda arrives in Gumbo City to win back her daughter's affections. Duff reports she went in for the audition and "kicked ass." She was quickly signed to a three-year contract beginning in August 2001. In her spare time, Duff continues post work on her directional debut *SONG OF THE VAMPIRE*, in which she also stars, alongside Julie Michaels (PF 2.2, 8.2) of *JAGSON GOES TO HELL*, and *ATTEN MIDNIGHT* star Julian McWhirter (PF 8.9).

• Miss Teen USA of 1986, Kelly He (PF 7.13, 7.15, 8.8) plays Cassandra in the prequel to Universal's *MUMMY* films *THE SCORPION KING*, starring The Rock. One of He's first roles was as the reluctant party girl who gets her neck snapped during a deadly dance with Jason Voorhees in *FRIDAY THE 13TH, PART VIII: JASON TAKES MANHATTAN* (1988).

• Fans of the *SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE* and *SORORITY HOUSE MASSACRE* series finally have a place to worship. Tony Brown, a hoon with a penknife for knowing all things SLUMBER related, has created a fantastic unofficial website with weekly updates on proposed sequels, interviews with cast members and directors, photo's and scores of additional links to other beloved horror flicks from the 1980's. Check it all out at www.grooo-necrochickslaidesplace.com!

• Producer and Actress extraordinaire Tori Spelling has directed her first feature, *KILLJOY 2: DELIVERANCE FROM EVIL*. The tale of a killer clown who stalks a group of juvenile delinquents during a rehabilitation program in the woods, stars a mostly African American cast including Olympia Ferrante, Meagan Petters, Rhonda Curnow, Jennifer Chamborough and Logan Alexander plus Debbie Rochon and Wayland Germany Boyd (*HELLABYUM*). *Troma* Films' veteran Trent Haaga tops off as the chosen from Hell who exploits each of the teens' worst nightmares.

Early sales records have shown the film, as released on video in January 2002, to be extremely successful, with over 20,000 VHS and DVD units sold during its one-period run. Watch for our pieces on *KILLJOY 2* and the lady at the helm, Tori Spelling, in an upcoming issue. Check out www.torospelling.com for more info.

Denice Duff now sits on *YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS*



● **Halloween** surrounding HALLOWEEN: HOMECOMING scenes to escalate by the day. After rumors Laureen Stevens (Jamie Lee Curtis) perched in the new film blazed through the internet and various magazines, it now seems someone at Dimension may have realized a big mistake was being made. Reports say Curtis was brought back to film new scenes (hence the film's delay) which feature cinema's most famous screenwriter surviving. Actors from the film, including Curtis, battle back and forth in various reports on the elements of truth (Curtis insists she survived), but one thing is for sure: HALLOWEEN's die-hard fans seem to have had their voices heard.

In addition to Curtis' new scenes, it's also been said other scenes were added to beef up the action sequences so the film could have the ability to stand up against other box offices boggies when it's released.

Brooke Stevens, who continues to reign as one of the busiest women Hollywood with another ten films to her credit in 2001 (talking one short of her 2000 list), leads the lecherous reapers, who also include Wayland, Jeremy Beyd and FF's own Jason Paul Collum (who can also be seen in a closing scene cameo with Sultan and Josephine Scampy of the all-female metal band The Iron Maidens www.micromonadics.com). Fans will be delighted with the lovely models who meet gruesome ends: Stacey Sconley (THE BROTHERHOOD II), Debbie Mayer (BLOOD DOLLS), Olympia Femvertising (KILLJOY 2) and newcomer Sunny Lambardo join Tanya Dempsey whose rapidly growing list of horror titles has her bordering *Scary Queen* status. Check out www.terrified.com for more info, and watch for an exclusive interview with Ms. Dempsey in an upcoming issue.

● Reminiscent at a new place is the Brigitte Bardot stunner DIDI DEPI DIDI (a.k.a. SWEET REVENGE). The sultry diva is "Macy," a young lass devoured by her gangster boyfriend, Richard Grimes (ABSOLUTION), who leaves her for dead following a host. But Macy is a girl who'll take sweetening lying down, so she's on the revenge trail, set for her share of the money and a return to a once-normal life. □

James Lee Curtis (left in H2O) discovers the terror is coming home again in Summer's HALLOWEEN: HOME COMING. Brigitte Bardot (b.) tells her secrets to DIDI! DIDI! Director, writer and actress Tanya Sultan (r.) continues her climb to success.



In Summer 2002 (I hope not forget HALLOWEEN: H2O) proved it had some pretty stable legs at the summer boxoffice in 1998). Look for hottie Tyra Banks in a supporting role.

● Rumor has it a new BRADY BUNCH movie is heading for theaters in the upcoming year. But neither the original cast from the 1970's sitcom nor the cast from the mid-1990's updated spoofs (which included THE CRAFT's Christine Taylor, SOMETIME'S THEY COME BACK AGAIN's Jennifer Elise Cox and Shelly Long of CHEERS fame) will be making appearances. No set details were available, but we're assuming a new cast is being put together because the original actors just can't stay growing older... Hey, why not use the now adult casts and speed the one season run of THE BRADY BUNCH? Quee the prime target...

● Models are being eaten by flesh and clothes tearing zombies! Well, actually they're more like Brim Reapers, but they're no less terrifying in HELL ASYLUM (formerly PRISON OF THE DEAD 2), an extremely gory flick from Danny Devan (HORRORVISION). Written by Devan and Trent Haaga (TERROR FIRMER) and produced by J.R. Bookwalter and Tamra Sutton, the movie follows five models roaming a supposedly haunted building for the faux reality show "Hell Challenge." What the models don't know is that the producers (including Joe Estevez of BEACH BABIES FROM BEYOND and UNSPEAKABLES Tim Matheson) have rigged up FX throughout the building. What none of them know is that the building really is haunted. Seems a former owner used to marry women, then lock them up in his basement until they were starved/forced to death. Fun. The present day intruders awaken the dead bodies and the bloodshed begins.



THE WOMEN OF

MARVEL COMICS



BY
DAN
SCAPPEROTTI

Women in comics is nothing new. The distaff members of the pen and ink set have been around since the beginning. Remember Dale Arden and Wilma Deering, the female members of the Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon strip? Wonder Woman and Sheena, Queen of the Jungle left their marks as straight heroes but frequently, the girls were damsels, secondary characters. In recent years that has changed and the powers that be at Marvel Comics intend to give the heroines their due.

Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada, who read comics as a kid, came into the industry a decade ago. He realized that there is a large demographic that has been basically ignored by the four-color industry. "We struggled for a long time with the portrayal of women in comics," said Quesada. "If you look at those early *Fantastic Four* issues, Sue seems to be playing second fiddle to the rest of the team. While the rest of the team was out doing action,

Sue stood on the sidelines until she was needed. We know that we lacked a big demographic in respect to reading comics: female readers. There have been times when we've added characters to comics strictly for the T&A value, but recently there has been a concerted effort in our industry to create strong female leads to attract a female audience. There has been a modicum of success with that. We're still trying to find what our female readers want. I think that has to do with our need to expand our demographics and even accommodate the changing tastes of our male readers who are looking for a strong female lead in comic books.

"I think comic books deal with realism a little bit better these days than they did back in the earlier days when there was a big fantasy element. Now we see superheroines with feet of clay who are more reflective as to what is happening outside in society. We try to create fe-





The green and oh-so-sexy She-Hulk will be getting her own series next year.

"WE TRY TO CREATE FEMALE CHARACTERS THAT REFLECT REAL WOMEN."

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF JOE QUESADA

more characters that reflect real women and real sensibilities."

Sex in comics, except for underground publications, didn't exist. The half-naked jungle queen wasn't about to bed down with the white hunter. The relationship between Diana Prince and Steve Trevor never rose above the platonic. And, of course, Lois Lane's virtue stayed intact for decades. That has changed in many of today's comic publications and it's not uncommon to find a superheroine married or having affairs.

Marvel is also looking to update their adult content as well as banish sexist stereotypes. "It really depends on the book," said Quesada. "We've been dealing with a lot of the sexist overtones that a lot of females point out in comic books. If you look at society, you notice that almost every men's magazine on the newsstands has a beautiful woman on the cover and almost every women's maga-



zine has an even more beautiful woman on the cover. Then you look at comic books and generally you have a lot of guys in spandex on the cover. The way women have been portrayed in the past and the outfits we put them in have been a little tougher for female readers to swallow. Most women like to think of themselves as sexy, just as most men want to think of themselves as masculine. It is very important that these women are portrayed as strong and sexy, but strong is really the key and really independent of the whole male stereotype. There's a lot of room for growth and we're attacking it very strongly. Our Elektra Assassin is a great step in that direction. There are books by other publishers that are also taking steps in the right direction. We have a new book called Alax which deals with a female protagonist."

The new monthly book features a female detective, your basic gumshoe private eye, but in the Marvel Universe, Alax's book story is that she was once a superhero who became disillusioned with the whole superhero game. Now she's a private investigator who deals with cases that are superhero or super-villain related. "People come to her with all sorts of problems," said Quesada. "It's kind of like CHINATOWN with a female lead and with superhero villains."

The Marvel female action hero is gender neutral. A detective on women's issues is not the focus of Alax. Storm, Spider Girl, or any of the other women in the Marvel Universe. "Most of our books are in the action adventure genre," Quesada said, "so most of them don't deal with political issues. That's not to say that you can't pick up an issue of Captain America and get slapped in the face with a major political issue that's being reflected in the comic. There may be a particular issue that deals with these issues but it's not the di-





king force...the driving force behind them is to tell the most interesting stories possible."

Of all the women in the Marvel Universe none are more popular than the mutant members of the X-Men. Ororo Munroe was at one time an African storm goddess. Her powers can create any type of precipitation from rain to snow and call up hurricane force winds. Now, as **Storm** she uses her power to manipulate the weather in defense of mankind. Shape-shifting is the province of Raven Darkholme known to her X-Men friends as **Mystique**. Her mutant power allows Mystique to change her appearance to any other human or humanoid creature. Her metamorphosis is so complete that retina and fingerprints are exact duplicates of the original.

Rogue is another mutant who has the



uncanny power to absorb the talents and memories of others by a mere touch. In an encounter with Ms. Marvel, Rogue gained super strength and the ability to fly. "Rogue is another great character that speaks to a female demographic," said Quesada. "We do things with Rogue that go against the grain. I can't tell you how many people e-mail me get saying 'You can't do that to Rogue, we love her!' There will be a Rogue miniseries actually coming out called **ROGUE**. This is Rogue's icon story being written by Prom Avery who does a lot of screenwriting especially for **BABYLON FIVE** and who is a big Rogue fan. She came to us and begged to do a Rogue story."

According to Quesada there's no character more popular right now than **Jean Grey**, quite an



endorsement for a chick whose been around since 1963.

"These characters have amazing fan bases," said Quesada. "They have websites built around them. We're doing a series of miniseries where each X-MEN character will have a solo adventure and they're called icons."

The pantheon of Marvel characters also includes **Black Cat**, **Nova**, **Tigra**, and the **Black Widow**. "The Scarlet Witch is a classic Stan Lee character," said Quesada of the character whose real name is Wanda Maximoff. "She was one of the Avengers and as history goes, she is the daughter of Magneto who eventually defected her father's side of the camp and moved over with the good guys."

One of the first Marvel superheros was Susan Storm Richards, a.k.a. the **Invisible Woman**, created by Stan Lee and



Top: Mystique, (mid) Storm, Jean Grey (below and right) are all mutants of the popular X-MEN series.



Jack Kirby in 1961 as a member of the Fantastic Four. She was aboard the rocket that took her and the other group members into space returning bombarded with cosmic radiation, the four returned to Earth with mutant abilities. She discovered that she could make herself invisible.

For the younger contingent, there's *Spider-Girl* Mary "Mayday" Parker is the daughter of the original Spider-Man who has inherited her father's powers. "She has a very strong young girl following," said Quesada. "She appeals to younger girls because of the high school soap-opera thing that's going on there. That's one of the books that I recommend to

readers who are coming in and want to give something to a younger child or young girl to get into comics."

Although she hasn't had a comic in years, one of Europe's predominant female artists is scheduled to bring back *She-Hulk* who will be getting her own miniseries next year. She-Hulk's attorney Jennifer Walters who, while getting a blood transfusion from Bruce Banner, got more than she bargained for and now has green whenever she gets excited.

In America, the comic book has always been looked at as a vehicle for juvenile readers and in the '50s when stories became too intense, there was a righteous hue and cry demanding that the





"THESE CHARACTERS HAVE AMAZING FAN BASES. THEY HAVE WEBSITES...."

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF JOE QUESADA

comics be toned down, ensuring that adult audiences would be discouraged from reading the adult fare. In Japan, the manga comics are aimed at various audiences. There are comics for children, teenagers, and adults.

In a frightening market, Marvel has decided to target new audiences by reviving an old comic line and calling it Max. "Years ago Marvel had an adult imprint called Epic which predated DC's Vertigo line by ten years," Quesada said. "They put out some very cutting edge stuff and then went the way of the dinosaur about fifteen years after its inception. Then Marvel dedicated itself to doing nothing but superhero fare for little kids. Before I was editor-in-chief, Marvel decided they didn't want to expand their horizons. I felt we needed a mature reader's imprint because there are a lot of readers who have a hungering for these kinds of stories I'm not talking X-rated stories just stories you generally don't want to tell in a regular comic for a ten-year-old kid. It also means there will be some on-panel violence; there will be some harsher language, what you would probably get in an R-rated movie. It just allows the creators to tell some stories that you couldn't tell in a regular comic book that was going to be distributed for the general public."

"We're starting off with some Marvel characters that would adapt to the adult genre. I wouldn't do a Max book starring Spider-Man because I think that sends the wrong message. Spider-Man is candy to a lot of little kids so you don't want to cross those beams, so to say. We can use characters like Luke Cage and Nick Fury. I think you could do a great pulp war story with Nick Fury with some strong language and wartime violence in it that you can't get



away with in the mainstream comics. Nick Fury is a star." Although Marvel had been trying to get into big screen features for years, last year's boxoffice blockbuster X-MEN didn't translate to comic sales. "The movie had a slight spike in sales," said Quesada, "and the reason it didn't have a bigger spike is completely and totally our fault here at Marvel. It was before I was here in this position and I think it's one of the reasons why I'm here in this position now." The X-Men books, throughout the history of Marvel as they go along year after year, became more and more complex and more tied to their own continuity, so if a new reader decides to come in and pick up an X-Men book, they either get discouraged right away and put it down because they have no idea what's going on, or they happen to be someone with a lot of time on their hands who's willing to do the homework and research for years of continuity and try and piece all these elements together. "At the point when the movie came out, X-MEN books became the most convoluted they've ever been in the history of X-Men to the point where X-Men fans were leaving the book saying they [had] no idea what was going on. From a corporate standpoint it was a big mistake. We just had a brand new relaunch a few months ago, so if you pick up X-Men books now you will see the power of the movie reflected in the comics. You can pretty much pick up any X-Men book now and you will not be confused. We got hung up in our superhero long underwear. The reality is that when Stan Lee and Jack Kirby and the rest were creating the Marvel Universe there was no continuity. They just made the stories up as they went along and that's what we're trying to enforce on our writers right now. Forget continuity. Let's make up some new, exciting stories."

With bad girl Elektra back on the side of right and Alena about to hang out her shingle, Marvel is dealing from a deck loaded with strong female characters. □



An interview with the
most sought-after
cover artist
working
today

JOE JUSKO



By Mike Watt

There's a beautiful painting in front of me: Captain America, the patriotic Marvel Comics superhero, standing at attention before a translucent American flag; below him, the words "We Will Never Forget."

"I did this for The Police and Freeman's Widows and Orphans Fund," the artist says. "It's for the families of all the people who died in the World Trade Center. Dynamic Forces is publishing it, and all profits from the sales of the print and the auction of the

original will go to the fund. Two guys I know were buried under the building. That was one of the reasons I wanted to do this."

The artist is Joe Jusko, a name as familiar to comic book fans as Captain America himself. He's one of the most sought-after cover artists working in the industry. Thanks to the very popular Marvel Masterworks card set, Jusko has painted just about every top character in the Marvel Universe, infusing otherworldly superhumans with a sense of ultra-reality. In this set, Jusko made Wolverine, Nick Fury, and The Black Cat come to life; he made them into real people. He did the same thing with the beautiful Vampirella in a fully painted series called "Bloodlust." Presently he's hard at work on a fully-painted Tomb Raider special for Top Cow.







QUSKO
12H



From the pages of *Tomb Raider*, Jusko's illustrations feature the beautiful Lara Croft.

and weights are as prevalent as the artwork and toys. It isn't too much of a stretch to hypothesize that because Jusko is comfortable with himself, his female characters appear as realistic as his men (very much unlike the prevalent image of sword-wielding women women in thongs and bras barely containing the watermelons growing from their chests).

"I'm actually a real person who treats this like a job," Jusko says. "Some of [artists] have that this is my life and I don't know anything else outside of this. They can't talk to you about anything other than comic books. I get together with my friends and the last thing we talk about is comic books. I love what I do and spend an inordinate amount of time doing it. But you have to diversify your interests or you'll just go insane."

As for the popular "balloon-behind" look in comics: "There was a period a couple of years ago that, if you went through the catalogs, all the comics seemed to be like porn magazines. Thank God that period seems to have passed. I think publishers realized that started to get a little out of hand in a lot of ways. I don't think you need the 44-imp-0 balloons leaping out and stabbing you in the eye on every page."

Jusko's talent was evident from a very young age. While still in high school, he won the DC Comics Award for Excellence in Cartooning. Which was, he explained, "basically a letter and a gift certificate for something like twenty-five bucks. So I went and bought paints. But early on, I had no painting lessons. I used whatever media I could. I used water colors and acrylics and markers, colored pencils, all kinds of stuff. And I don't really I didn't switch over to the acrylics until I did the Burroughs set, and that was



Success came and went at first. He sold a half dozen covers for various comics, primarily the Marvel magazine *Savage Sword of Conan*, and paid the bills as a police officer. Then came the big break: "It's like cycling," he explains. "You do lots of work for years but you get that one role and suddenly people notice you. Probably the thing that catapulted me were the Marvel Masterpiece Cards, and those cards really blew. I did like a hundred and four paintings in ninety days. They did wonders for my career, but I look back at them and think 'Oh man! You just don't do 104 paintings in ninety days.'

"There are some good things about them for what they are. In

[about] seven years ago, But I was still using mixed media up until then because I just wasn't sure what I was doing. Once I decided to use the acrylics exclusively, I learned to use them. I feel like I can finally use them to get the effects that I want to. A lot of people tell me that they can't figure out I use acrylics or oils."

At seventeen, Jusko ran into writer-illustrator Howard Chaykin (*Blank Kiss*, *Ironwolf*) of a comic book store in Greenwich Village and wound up assisting the man on his adaptation of Samuel R. Delaney's *Empire*. "I was with him a total of about five months. We got along well. He's a great talent. He was doing work at Heavy Metal at the time—which is how I got in at Heavy Metal. I'd done three paintings in my entire life up until that point and they bought one of the paintings and used it as a cover. Then I went up to Marvel and went out on my own."

"I really appreciate about a good-lookin'

a lot of sets that came after that. Artists were just using generic poses. I knew all the characters, so I was able to capture their personalities, which I think worked really well. But as far as the paintings go, they're just not good paintings, technically. I would have loved to have had the time I had for the Burroughs set to work on the card. The originals are tiny six-by-eight-and-a-half inches tall. They look great card-sized. But when they blew them up and made comics out of them, every time I see them I shudder. You could see the pencils—it's just god-awful."

On the table, next to the Captain America print, is a stack of color copies of the finished Tomb Raider pages. They're breath-taking. If you consider the time that is so obviously involved in this kind of undertaking, it's not surprising that Jusko doesn't often pitch these kinds of projects. He's said before that he doesn't have the patience to work on a monthly series—his work on the short-lived Black Panther series for Marvel lasted three issues. "Although I wasn't supposed to go beyond issue two, initially, they offered me the third issue halfway through the second one, because they figured that it was the end of the story arc and they couldn't find someone to finish the book at that time. So I took the third book to do it, but one of the reasons I chose not to do storytelling from the start is because I've never had the speed to do it. I admire guys who can sit there and just pencil their cases off and get stuff done. Prolific guys like John Byrne and John Lucero—who was my god when I was a lad—those guys

Among Jusko's classics are (left) Mary Jane, (middle) Wonder Woman, and (bottom) R.J.P.



the female form. There's something about woman who's in charge of herself."

could draw anything right out of their head. I've never been able to do that. They knew when they hired me to do it that I wasn't the tallest guy on the earth. So I did all the finishes on the first book, and on the second and third I was just penciling. [But] I've always bounced around. My attention span is really short. I'm always jumping from place to place. I don't like to do the same thing over and over again."

The Tomb Raider book, then, is a rare beast: "When I had heard that Top Cow had the Tomb Raider license, I called them up. I wasn't a fan of the game, but I loved the concept of the character [before Lara Croft], and the look of the character. I'm much more interested in the reality-based characters than in the superhero genre. I can do it if I have to, but I really prefer the sword-and-sorcery and adventure stuff. I had done Lady Pendragon covers for Matt Hawkins when he had his own company, and when he moved over to Top Cow, he gave me the go-ahead to do a cover. And that cover [for the now out-of-print issue Number 6] took on a life of its own. It became a really popular image."

With this success of the first cover, Jusko decided that he still loved the look and feel of the Lara Croft character. "I told the guys at Top Cow that I was interested in painting an entire book which is a rarity for me. It had to be something I'm really interested in to get me to commit that kind of time to it. The only other time I did that was on the *Vampirella: Bloodlust* book I painted a couple of years ago.

"[Top Cow] was more than happy to oblige me, which was great. I called [writer] Don Jurgens and we talked about things I'd like to see done in the script. I asked him to keep the cast of characters down to a bare minimum. I'm painting the whole book, so I didn't want ten thousand Arabs on camels all over the place."

Jusko's version of Tomb Raider is more about the adventurer Lara Croft, rather than the large-chested star of pre-teenage fan-boy fantasies. Unlike the big screen movies, Joe chose to focus on the character, rather than on the sex of her chest.

"I'm a realist painter. There are guys who would have done this and every second panel would have been a crotch shot—or a big-boob shot, and that wasn't my goal. I'm not doing a boob book—I'm telling a story. I was sort of painting my own movie. The character has an opinion of her own and you don't have to get explicit. I really appreciate the female form. There's something very attractive about a good-looking woman who's in charge of herself. Chaykin once told me that my women are sexy and informative because I actually get lost and I don't have to live out my frustrated sexual fantasies through my art [laughs].

"I'm doing a book of sketches next year that will have a lot of pin-up stuff in it, and one of the series that I'm doing, whimsically called 'Buns with Guns,' is film noir paintings of women in dominant situations. Instead of being the victim they're the aggressor—not even the aggressor, just the powerful presence in the painting. I think it's more attractive than looking at someone who's completely submissive. Some guys are into that, I guess. I like a little fight in my girls. I find it much more attractive and more interesting to paint."

Which explains his love for characters like Vampirella—"I've been a Vampirella fan since I was a kid. There's something about that character—it's a simple design, but the character is just really attractive. And there's something about that costume—as little of it as there is—that just really works. Since I was a kid I always wanted to draw her, and *Bloodlust* was my chance. It's nice to see that she's getting a resurgence now. The stuff that Mike

Mayhew is doing in the book now is just incredible work. I think I may have to step on his hand [laughs]."

How does Jusko explain his obsession with Barbara Eden? An upcoming issue of Arwave Comics' official licensed *I Dream of Jeannie* comic book will boast a fully painted Jusko cover featuring Jeannie in full genie regalia—the painted novel is the only deviation from the show's original design.

"That was one of those childhood fantasy things. Since I was a kid I had a crush on Barbara Eden, and as I got older I started collecting memorabilia. I have original cards from the [opening animation of the] TV show. I have original TV Guide art from the '60s—all kinds of stuff. I worked hard on this painting. And I heard that Barbara Eden just loved the painting. So I'm going to do a couple more."





Noted Jesus of mainstream influences, "I think I avoid what's popular. It's just the rebel in me."

Admittedly, he's not the fastest artist in the world. How long does it take him to do a painting? "Jeff Jones had a great answer to that question," Jukka says. "Someone asked him how long it takes to do an average painting, and he said, 'Not as long as it takes to do a good one.' It varies depending on how big the painting is and how many characters are in it. Anywhere from a few days to a couple of weeks."

Tomb Raider has a ways to go then, though he's optimistic that the book will be on the stands by the time this article appears in print.

And after that? "A guy who reps a bunch of people—like Mike Magnoli for Disney [ATLANTIS] and Jim Bradstreet who worked on BLADE—asked me if I was interested in being in the pool of guys who they'd call when conceptual work [was] needed. I said absolutely. But I have to finish what I have in the house first. My priority is finishing up the Tomb Raider book and the rest of the things I have to do. And then it'll be done. I want to take some time off from comics for a while. I want to do some gallery paintings and wildlife art and some print-up stuff."

"The commercial grind is killing me. I've been doing this for twenty-five years and the idea of working seven days a week, twelve hours a day is just not fun any more. I just want to paint what I want to paint, sell prints and art books, and if I can do that,



"I'll be happy."

The alternative would be scaling back the amount of work he puts into his craft. And, of course, that's no option either. "That's not the way I work. I give 100% when I work. There have been times where you don't have enough time to do what you want to do, and my work has suffered because of the time constraints. This is where I have to thank Top Cow at the point for saying, 'Look, we love what you're doing. Take as much time as you need, and when you finish it, we'll print it.' We want this to be the best work you've ever done. I don't think anyone is ever going to give me an opportunity like this again."

"Mark Allесс from CrossGen saw pages and called me to say he absolutely loves what I'm doing—he hates painted comics—and doesn't think anyone will be able to match it. So at this point, I have off this pressure on me, and I want to go in and make it even better, which is slowing me down even more! Now, I wish people hadn't seen it and I wouldn't know what they think of it, because [with] every single brush stroke I [think] 'Man, this has to be perfect!' I'm the stereotypical insecure artist."

I spend a little more time studying the Tomb Raider, admiring the detail, and knowing that this might be the last Jukka-painted book for some time. "Actually," he says, "I'd never wanted to do another painted book. I would want to do a Silver Surfer book."

The Silver Surfer is a character I've always liked—Silver Surfer and Mephisto. That's going back to the dark part of my mind, paint Mephisto down in hell. I could have so much fun painting stuff like that. It's funny as much as I like having a sense of humor in my work, I hate painting light airy things.

"I think I avoid what's popular. It's just the rebel in me. I didn't watch THE SIMPSONS for five years [because] everyone was telling me how great it was. I'm always one to go against the grain for some reason. If a million people are doing one thing, I'd just as soon do something else. I don't know why. It keeps me growing." □







MARVEL COMICS WRITER

ELEKTRA

BRIAN
MICHAEL
BENDIS

BY DAN
SCAPPEROTTI

Bad girl makes good. Girl that is. The WWF isn't the only place where the villain becomes the hero. Gone but not forgotten is Xena, Warrior Princess and it took the saving of 40,000 souls to gain her redemption. The hero ranks of the Marvel Universe recently swelled to include the raven-tressed Elektra. Comic book master Frank Miller created the sexy one-time assassin and bounty hunter in 1981 when she appeared in the Daredevil comic book series.

When her father, a prominent Greek diplomat, was murdered, Elektra Natchios is devastated and disillusioned. She leaves her boyfriend, a blind American law student named Matt Murdock and goes to Japan where she trains as a samurai. Soon Elektra is fluently training in the martial arts, but her anger of the world was too ingrained, and she was called to leave the group. Elektra, however, is recruited by a secret organization known as the Hand.

The Hand, a band of Ninja assassins for hire, is working from a darker place that suits Elektra's inner turmoil. Understanding that her anger and everything that would make her a samurai would make her a perfect assassin for them, the Hand welcomed their new recruit. Elektra is determined to prove herself, but is tricked by the Hand into killing the sensei with whom she once trained. Corrupted by the Hand, Elektra became an assassin, but eventually turned on the organization and fled back to Japan.

Years later, after earning a reputation as a hired gun, Elektra returned to America for a contract in New York City. There she became reacquainted with Matt Murdock, whom she discovered was the alter ego of Daredevil, the blind superhero. Although Daredevil opposes Elektra's profession, the pair team up to fight against the Hand. However, the assassin was eventually killed away by the Kingpin, the most powerful figure in the East Coast criminal underworld. In her new role, Elektra constantly fought with Daredevil, until, once again, she saw the light. Contracted to kill Franklin "Foggy" Nelson, Daredevil's best friend, Elektra spares his life. In an attempt to impress his boss, the Kingpin, Bullseye brutally murders Elektra. The Hand sees this as a chance to regain control of their top killer by bringing the dead woman back to life through a mystical ceremony. Daredevil punishes her spirit so when Elektra is resurrected she is free of the corrupting forces of the Hand.

That was twenty years ago. When Marvel recently decided to revive the character, they tapped writer Brian Michael Bendis, who works on both alternate Spider-Man and Daredevil. Bendis, who decided of age



"SHE HAS A LEVEL OF EXPERTISE THAT MAKES HER TOTALLY UNIQUE."

WRITER
BRIAN
MICHAEL
BENDIS

rine that he wanted a career in comics, was intrigued with the possibilities. He came up with the story for the first issue of *Bektra Assassin* #1 that appeared in July. The project uses a completely unique computer-generated art style. There is no hand art. Chuck Austen, who has a background in animation, is doing the pencils and ink drawings. Nathan Syring does the computer coloring and Greg Horn works on covers and conceptual art.

"She was a misunderstood villain," said Bendis of the heroine. "She's one of those characters that everyone liked. She's an assassin, but Frank Miller created such a history with her and pathos and an understanding of how she got where she is that people just loved her. People wanted to follow her. She was a cross between Clint Eastwood and LA FEMME NIRO. There were very few female comic characters with such rich characterization and underivable humanity to them, even though what they're doing is so inhuman. We've tipped our hats to the Frank Miller years while creating something new for her, and by doing so, the takes center stage which changes the point of view of her. She's not so much the heroine as she is the person we're rooting for. Like in *PULP FICTION* you're rooting for John Travolta and he's the bad guy. It's time for some kick-ass Ninja action adventure with a lot of pathos. She's one of those characters that's used very little of Marvel but if [has been] twenty years and people still love her. So this is a daunting task to take the reins in launching this character."

When last seen, Bektra had managed to get to a mountain retreat in Tibet, a sanctuary she had dreamed of reaching. Bendis' job is to bring her back. "In the original story she was a college student whose father was kidnapped," he explained. "During the hostage situation, one of the cops shot him by accident because he stood up in front of the window led to his chat, and that single act sent her spiraling down a road of self-hatred and self-discovery that cascaded her abilities to become an assassin and her abilities as a Ninja. Even the name. Bektra, hearkens to some kind of obsessive love for her father that will never be felt again and is missing in her life. Bektra is dipped directly into the philosophy of the Ninja. There is a lot of life, death, and resurrection involved. Life and death are just energy pushed and pulled and that's sort of the world she's been trained in. So here she is, killing people and yet she has a very unique understanding of what that is. In the Frank Miller series, she was actually murdered in one of the greatest dramatic scenes in comics ever and quickly brought back to life by her fellow Ninja. She's been murdered, brought back to life, yet kills people for money. I find that very fascinating. That's something you don't see in every comic. We've got to know about the person. 'Who is she working for, and why?' are the questions that have to be answered."

Bendis' thirty-four-page script for the premiere issue of *Bektra Assassin* is laid out in screenplay fashion with stage directions and notations for the artists such as: "The opening sequences should have severely muted colors. So saturated to the point of almost black and white." Stanley Kubrick, an agent of S.H.I.E.L.D., is trying to enlist Bektra's aid in assassinating a Middle Eastern despot who is working for Hydra.

"*S.H.I.E.L.D.* is a super-secret CIA," Bendis explained. "*S.H.I.E.L.D.* harks back to the glory days of James Bond. *Bektra* is now given the opportunity to do something that's bigger than herself for money, but is the right thing to do?"

The gorgeous assassin's parlor to two outfits, her black costume and a red one. "The red outfit is based on her Ninja robes," said Bendis, "which she made more stylized and identified her as a member of this unit called the Hand, which is a mystical group of Ninja assassins who trained her. She sort of took that outfit and wears it in wraps and that's the way you see it."

Although she is a skilled martial artist and proficient in the use of a number of weapons, Bektra prefers the sai, a three-pronged dagger developed in the 17th century. "That's a very specialized weapon," said Bendis. "The symbolism is that it is one of those weapons that you have to get very close to use. She doesn't do her killing from far away. If you kill someone from far away, it isn't as brutal as getting up close and doing it yourself. We've been able to develop a stylized sai for her, with braided prongs. There is something beautiful to it. She has been seen with swords, but she has a level of expertise with the sais that makes her totally unique, so we're sticking to them."

Although devoid of superpowers, Bektra has an ability that borders on the supernatural. Like Obi-Wan Kenobi, the beautiful assassin is able to influence people to do such things as look the other way. By mind-fucking people, it appears to them that she is able to slip in and out of shadows. "That's the coolest thing she does, because it's unexplained and she's so living in her own little world of shadows that it's fascinating to watch," said Bendis. "Basically the training of the Ninja, where all this comes from, is mind over matter. We talk about it in the third issue. There is this great Oriental sage called Ko Fung who invented it in the 1400's. He was the first Asian sage to be able to figure out how to control his endorphins and he was able to push all the buttons in his body to create whatever he needed for whatever situations. Bektra has those abilities too. She has total control over her body and can literally not feel pain by wishing it away. It's almost a spiritual thing, yet she is doing something violent with it."

Where once there were only a handful of title female comic book heroines, the plethora of publishing companies today has filled the ranks of distaff members of the superhero community. Bektra, however, has a difference. "There are a lot of female characters in comics that are just a chick in an outfit with a sword," said Bendis. "Beyond their looks there's not much going on, and even though Bektra is a bad girl, we're building around her and continuing with her strong characterization. Just because she's a girl character in comics doesn't mean she doesn't deserve to be explored as a human being. It's a big adventure, yet at the same time an intimate portrait of a woman with a unique perspective. It's the kind of book you're going to be looking for. It's not just pin-up art." □



The stark contrast of artist

JEFF PITTALE

by Mike Watt



Jeff Pittarelli's artwork puts one in mind of what the end result might be if H.R. Giger and Olivia got together to collaborate on a painting. Pittarelli paints beautiful, haunting, sinking women and surrounds them with what can only be described as mechanized bones, black roses, or alien hieroglyphics done in sharp relief. His paintings are usually monochromatic—sharp greys, cold blues, an occasional flash of crimson about the lips. Pittarelli's work goes beyond pop-culture and actually embraces the emotions which donor entertainment hopes to convey.

Pittarelli has been called a "horror artist." His work has a Chandler-esque feel to it, in addition to the no-way-out angst that the Gothic love so much. His figures have a quiet tension to them, particularly when painting the cult icons like Michelle Pfeiffer's Catwoman, Harrison Ford's Rick Deckard in *BLADE RUNNER*, and Brandon Lee as *THE CROW*. "I've always been attracted to a high-contrast look," Pittarelli says, "whether it be in my favorite movies, comics, horror mags, fetishes, etc. Black & white conveys more atmosphere and volume than color, which often flattens a figure's features rather than highlighting them. I do quite a bit of color too, though no one really sees it except for the die-hard fans of *Chiller Theatre Magazine*."

Most genre fans know of his work, even if they can't place the artist. Photo-realists suffer from virtual anonymity due to the nature of their form. Pittarelli's stark blacks, whites and greys—in direct

contrast to the warm colors employed by Vallois—help him to stand out amongst many of the other photo-realists working in the pin-up industry. "It's a contrast thing—the way a white figure pops out of a dark background appeals to me—definitely a film noir thing...and a goth thing too."

And while he's a master of painting women, it's obvious he isn't afraid to take on a few male subjects as well. But the fans love him for his beautiful renditions of the more iconic figures of the genre—Sarah Michelle Gellar as Buffy of her most faulom, for example. "If ever there were a modern-day hero that should be goth, it's Buffy. The show has taken a turn toward a yuppie appearance at times—which is good too, because the best offense is to blend in with a crowd rather than stand out, and Buffy does that!"

On the surface, there doesn't seem to be much to link the characters he paints, beyond their being strong female characters. At the outset, Catwoman has very little in common with the Mindy Clarke zombie character of "Julie" from Brian Yuzna's *RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD 3* or a bare-breasted Linda Carter as Wonder Woman. Pittarelli is quick to disagree, however. "I think Catwoman and Julie are actually very similar in their reluctance to be powerful, i.e. Julie turned into a immortal zombie and Catwoman resuscitated by her feline friends. I definitely gravitate toward these icons or, in my eyes, modern day heroes."

His large scale depiction of "Julie's Nightmare" is arguably one of his most famous pieces. Not because it is a masterpiece that perfectly captures the intensity of the body-augmenting undead siren—which it is—but because the painting was deemed degrading to women at the 1994 San Diego Comiccon. "Appar-

LLI





Pittorelli (below) surrounded by his incredible work noted, "I've always been attracted to a high-contrast look... black and white conveys more volume than color."

ently the Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists, were running the art show that year. Some religious zealots made one complaint, and the ASFA immediately folded under the pressure. [They] didn't even try to defend the art," Police tape was put around the offending areas—the [pierced] nipples. On the second day, the piece had been removed from the art show," says Pittorelli. "How totally ludicrous. It was from a movie—and actually shows a woman in a powerful way. I thought..."

Despite the accusations, Pittorelli has

made three full-sized paintings depicting the RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD 3 character, and each one is more striking than the one before it. His image of "Jule" is better-known than the movie itself. "I had started seeing images from the film about a year before it actually hit the video shelves.

"[Jule] was just a very striking figure...very sexy, gothic, and, of course, very pierced...my kind of woman [laughs]. I had already done three paintings before even seeing the film. But it's my favorite and hopefully we turned a lot of other people on to the film too."

There was even talk about Pittorelli doing an official adaptation of the movie in comic form, an idea which, sadly, has come and gone. "The license ran out before I could even get started on it. I just finished the intro page. Brian Yurka, the director of the film, has been trying to get it back for me, but it's a money thing with Tarnark Pictures and we've never really come to an agreement. I would even do it for nothing up front just to get it going. Brian feels it should be done, and only by me. But I believe he's starting work on the third *RE-ANIMATOR* film, *BEYOND RE-ANIMATOR*, and I'll be doing some conceptual work for that."

Though it should come as no surprise, many of the real-life women who played the characters he so often depicts are most likely unaware of Pittorelli's work. In the odd world of image rights and licenses

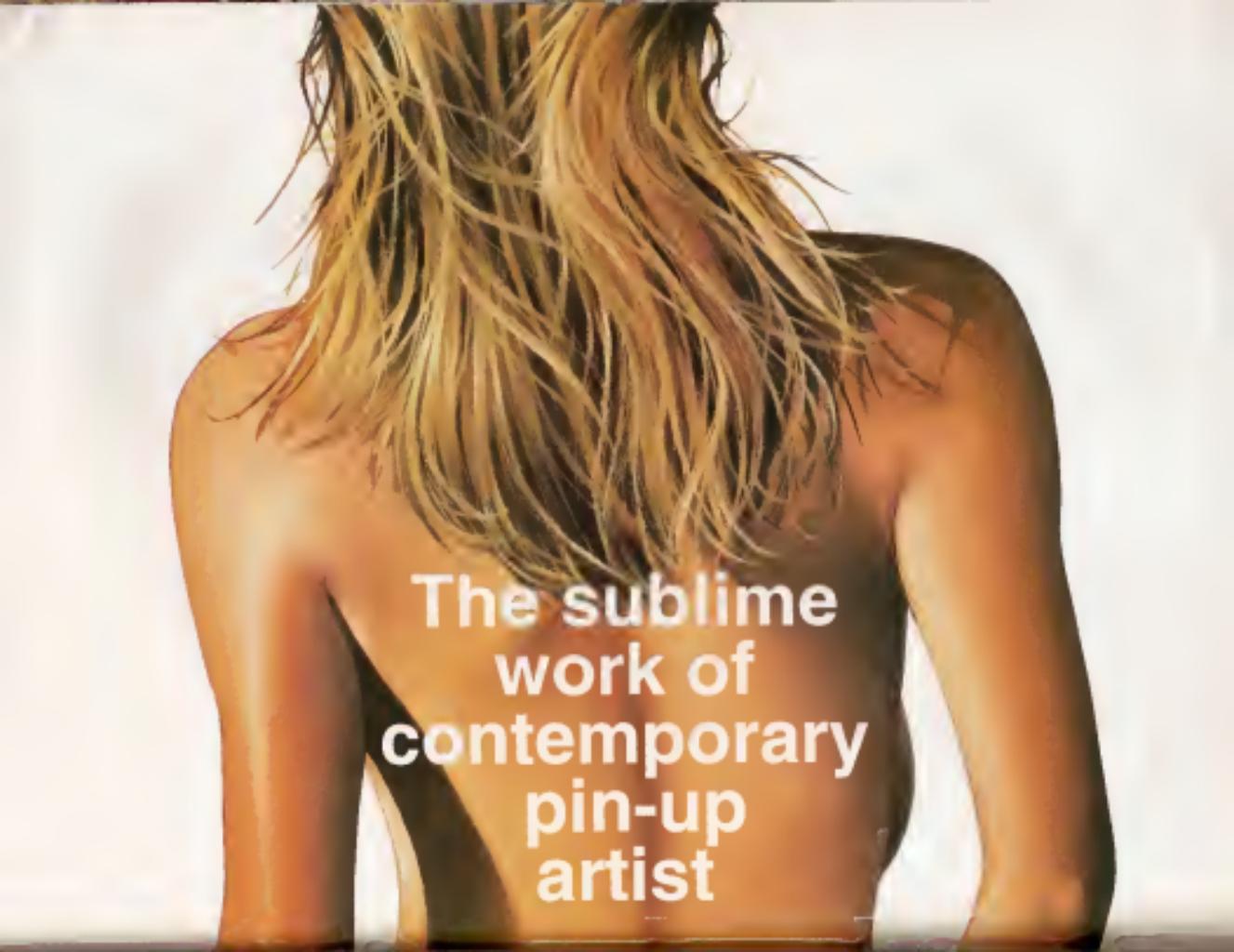


Jeff is free to paint these iconic characters without the living model in front of him giving her consent.

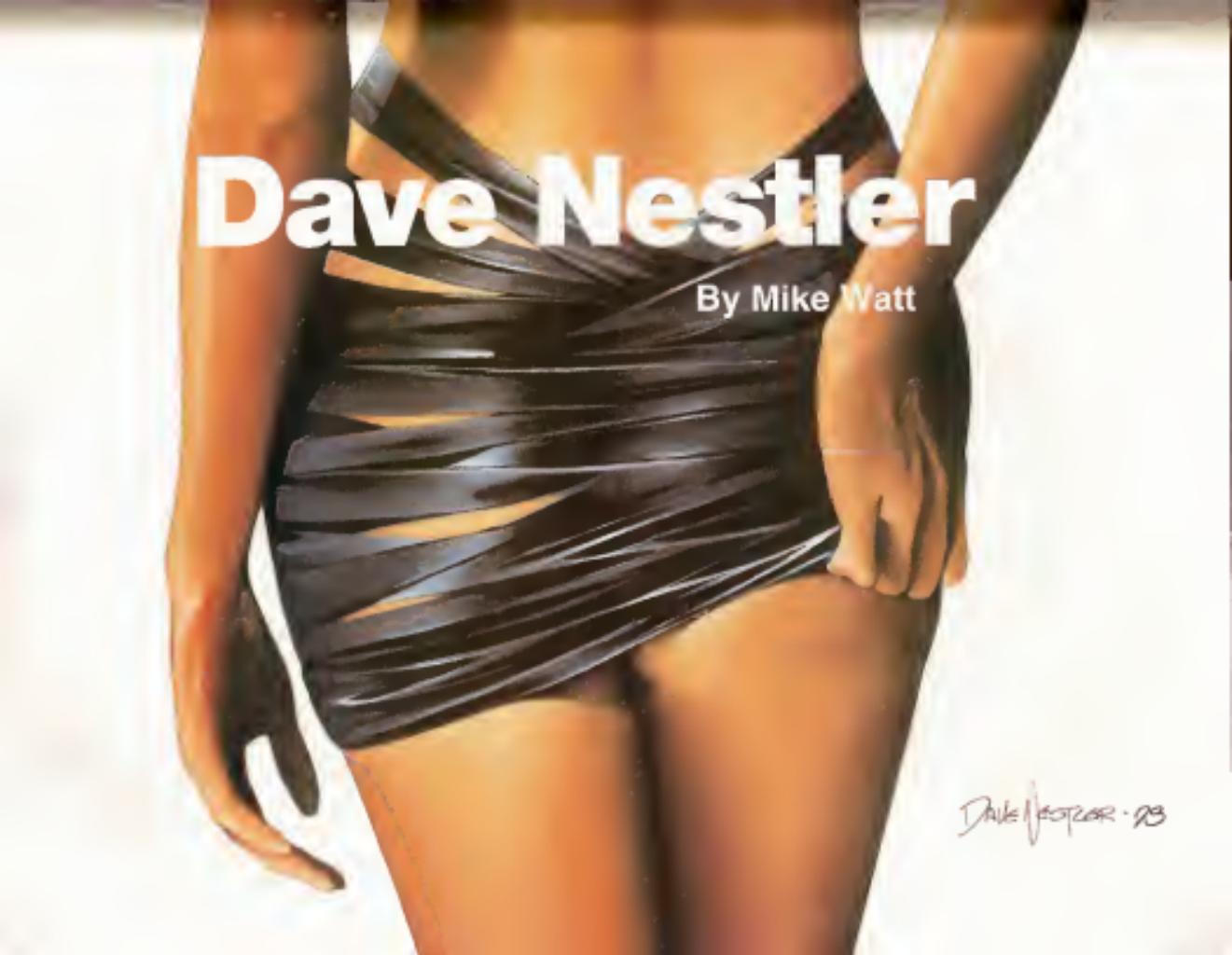
"I've never met Mindy [Charles]. Brian tried to get a print to her but to no avail. A friend of mine has gotten a print into Sarah [Michelle Gellar]'s hands with no comment yet. Clinton Anderson thought my depiction of her in her panties was 'cute.' No one else has commented or probably even seen my work as far as I know."

For information about Jeff Pittorelli and to see much more of his artwork, go to www.pittorelli.com





The sublime
work of
contemporary
pin-up
artist



Dave Nestler

By Mike Watt

Dave Nestler '93

Things change. Time, as they say, waits for no one. In order to keep going, one has to change with the times, adjust and adapt to new climates, new ideas introduced to society. As a species, we share very little with those who were alive just a hundred years ago, to say nothing of thousands of years ago. As individuals, we are confronted with new decisions every day, changes in the workplace, changes in our environment.

Artists, especially, are always looking for new ways to challenge themselves, either to stay ahead of trends, or to challenge themselves with it. Consider Dave Nestler, the man who became something of a sensation a few years ago when *Playboy* recognized his "Blonde and Gagged" pin-up series, photo-realistic paintings of beautiful young women bound by endless strips of black tape.

The series was dark, mysterious, erotic and oddly empowering, as the women stared out confidently, letting you know that this was very much their idea. Recently, Nestler's work has shone to go in different directions. "I've turned to the more fantasy-based pin-up, glamour and some retro sci-fi," says Nestler. "The criterion that I've received from the 'Blonde and Gagged' series has afforded me the opportunity to go off in different directions. Not just different art, but also different things... like writing. I'd always wanted to write a screenplay."

Based in Pittsburgh, PA, Dave Nestler is one of the more popular artists working in the pin-up and glamour art market today. His work is not only a staple at the bi-annual Glamourcon and comic book conventions, it also hangs in private galleries from New York to Germany. Nestler is at the top of his game right now, but it hasn't always been like



this. "I've only been in this business for about four years," Nestler confesses.

"I started out in Hollywood, working in the entertainment industry and eventually settled into advertising as an illustrator. In both cases, doing what art directors [told me]

to do, with minimal amount of creative freedom. Creatively, it was a roadblock and just got boring after a while. Once I was introduced to [the pin-up] market, I thought, 'Hell, this is what I do best, and I just found a market that supports it.' This is where I am now. Then I jumped into it and tried to figure out what direction I wanted to go."

The series which got him recognition first was born of necessity. Nestler knew he had the talent to compete in a market dominated by the one-name artists Olivia and Soryomo, but he needed something to set his brush stroke years apart from the sea of pin-up artists that were viable at the time.

Soon, the "Blonde and Gagged" series was born: women seared in yards of black tape. "It's a gimmick," he says. "This business is a circus and you have to be a little bit Barnum and Bailey. My 'Blonde and Gagged' series is not really about bondage. I'm not a bondage artist, per se. I'm not even a big fan of full-blown nudity. [An image of] a totally naked girl needs something to break it up. It's that old adage that swimsuit calendar sell better than nude calendars. Men prefer Victoria's Secret to most pornography—what does that say? Men like a little mystery. The tape allowed me to break up the areas of bare flesh. Some were [intended to be] design-oriented, some were sexually oriented. It made cause for interesting and diverse commentary. A lot of people read into each painting with a different idea. The hardcore erot-

ical people like it for what it shows as much as the classic pin-up people for what it doesn't. There's no fear in the girls' eyes. It's not about restraint. It's not about oppression. It became my signature. I could put a piece of tape on the forehead of a girl who's stark naked and people would recognize it as one of my pieces."

If you look at a Frank Frazetta, you can tell right away that no one but Frank could have painted it. The same goes for Iles Valente, the Brothers Hildebrandt and Duncan Cleggwanger. They all have distinctive styles. One of the chief reasons for Nestler's obsession with establishing originality stems from the limitations of his art-style. "As a photo-realist there's not much in my style that makes them stand out," he says. "Although you'll never mistake a Sorayama for anyone else. But that's hyper realism and this is beginning to get confusing. Nestler's women are not stylized, he tries to capture realistic details in his works and because of this, there is very little that marks a Nestler painting as a 'Nestler'."

Except for the first series, one thing that set Nestler apart from the other artists is that much of his work has a central theme that he assembles into a series, a thematic style, if you will. Because of the frenetic nature of the business, most pin-up artists don't often get the chance to do series paintings. Not every artist has Picasso's luxury of going through a "blue" period." Nestler's series had titles like "Pedantic Optimism" and "All Are Welcome." "The Adventures of P.J. Savonrich" tells a "good-girl art" story. He does variations on a theme, and enjoys doing so. As a writer might say, there is more than one way to tell a story, and Nestler explores that idea with his series art.

Nineteen paintings later, "Blonde and Gagged" is still going strong. The artist, however, is finding his interests heading in different directions. "With the 'Blonde and Gagged' series there is a restriction: the black tape. Albeit a wonderful restriction. How many different ways can I tie a girl up in black tape? Anybody

familiar with that series will remember that the last couple of paintings had very heavy bondage overtones. Girls kashed to crucifixes, blindfolds, that sort of thing. Without the benefits of whips, chains, ball-gags, and the accoutrements that usually come with [bondage art], it was all done with the black tape. But even a successful body of work gets tiring to an artist. Even from the beginning there was the need to mix it up, get away from it, to deviate. The latest painting in the series, the one with Gise-Anne Gilbert called "Brushstroke," is the first deviation. You think she's tied with the tape, but she's actually painting the stripes on her body. This was the first deviation. And I've been getting some interesting comments about it. People saying 'Oh, I thought it was tape and I didn't realize until I looked closer.' Which was always what I wanted them to do. Look closer."

Nestler's recent works are much more fantasy-oriented. While he has always dabbled with a more whimsical style, which is readily displayed in the popular three-piece series entitled "The Adventures of P.J. Savonrich," Nestler is stretching his legs a bit, trying to create more scenarios and fantasy settings in which to put his strong and sexy women. A quick look at his web page reveals a painting titled "Fallen Angel," dove-girl with the face and figure of PARIS OF ROME's Lori Dawn Meusel. Another has a blonde vampire girl standing before a portrait of Dracula. This piece is entitled "Daddy's Little Girl."

"The fantasy paintings allow me to go anywhere I want," Nestler says. "The fetch stuff pigeon-holed me in a lot of ways. There are only so many ways you can tape a girl up. And I didn't want to get to the point where that's all I was known for. But that's the challenge. The Playboy piece related to something like a "duct-taped girl." And that always cracked me up, because then I started hearing things like 'the duct-tape artist' or the 'black tape artist.' I get people who are heavy into the bondage scene asking me questions about technique and do-



"Men prefer Victoria's Secret to most pornography. Men like a little *mystery*."

complicating lifestyles and I'm like, "I don't know, I just paint the stuff." Sure, there's plenty of artists who do fantasy work, but I want to show people what I can do, in specific genres. I don't want to be stuck in a hole as having only one certain style. I always felt that versatility was one of my strong points. I'm not getting away from the erotic art market, I'm not bored with it at all. I'm just actually really enjoying the more fantasy-based and retro stuff that I'm doing now."

The common denominator throughout all of this has been his models. They exude confidence, independence, strength, charisma. Character. It's the smoldering strength that stands out when you look at a Nestler pin-up. And with each success, Nestler reaps the benefits of not only working with top models, but also intelligent, eager women who want to work with him. For Nestler it's a symbiotic relationship. "I started out working with dancers until I gained some recognition. And now I'm fortunate to be able to work with some of the greatest girls in the business. It works hand-in-hand for all of us. It might get some girls added exposure who haven't been in the business that long and get them into a new market with a whole new fan base. For myself, personally, it lends so much more to the painting if the fans know who the models are. There are people who are fans of my work and people who are fans of Julie Celine Stacey Walker's, a prime example, as many times as she's been painted. And now Joni Colton Loner (formerly Roseanne Michaels) pretty much all the best have painted her. I saw that last piece Emma Falakos ran on the *Junko art*—I've seen the first 18 pages of the Lombardi's thing he's doing—and it's insane how good it is! That's going to really be something. All beautiful pieces and every one looks like Joni."

It would be easy enough for Nestler to just pull reference out of different magazines, shot heads on generic bodies. But it wouldn't be real. It wouldn't feel genuine. This sense of ultra-reality, and the fact that he works with real women, is one of the highlights of a Dave Nestler painting.

"Dazio Del Rio is a girl I'm working with right now," he says. "She's a Latino calendar model from out west—one of those girls that not a lot of guys in this market know about. Really different, exotic-looking. Not the typical caucasian blonde that you always see. I'm working with a lot of new girls. Not just *Playmates*, either. I prefer to only work with the girls who want to work with me. I'm lucky that I've gained enough recognition that I don't have to go begging them anymore. When I talked to Brie Jensen and say 'I need reference material,'

"Over 100 photos showed up a week later. Those are the girls I want to work with. Shoe Works—I saw this one shot on your site, can you get me a print?" Bang, it's in the mail. So, it's the ones that take the interest, who are excited about it. Whoever wants to work with me, though, you know, I'm not denying, working with *Playmates* isn't a hard part of the biz. Unfortunately, with me being on the east coast and all the *Playmates* are centered on the west coast, I have to work from all reference material. I mean, hey, I'm an artist—I can put a third eye in the middle of your forehead. It's no big deal. But as far as the live girls that I've worked with, I don't have to say word one to Joni. She knows what you want and what you need. Same with Lisa Anne Devol—she always get good shots out of her. Julie Celine, we shot her at one of the Pittsburgh Comi-







T: "Daddy's Little Girl"
M: "Fallen Angel"
R: Dave at Glamourouse.



cons, shot her in a hotel room of the Holiday Inn, and I got one the best paintings I've ever done out of that shot. Big smiling face—if you ever met her, you know that's what she's all about: just an incredible smile. People have also asked me, "Who's your favorite model to work with?" Well, I'd never answer that. That's suicidal. They all are!"

And each model brings something new to Nester's work on their own. Often, Nester tells me, the idea comes first, then a search begins for the right model. Sometimes, however, the model inspires the idea.

"Some girls are perfect for certain scenes: Barbara Moore was perfect for the 'Daddy's Little Girl' piece—the sort of Universal vampire picture. Julie was perfect for a cheesecake retro piece. They just have that look, you know. Certain girls lend their personality to certain things. Julie Strain, for instance, doesn't conjure images of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. You could do it and people would go 'What? Come on!' She just looks better strapped up in leather and chains posing with long, cold weapons."

If that isn't enough to fill any artist's plate, Nester has plans for his next thematic series: "Dave Nester's Forgotten Hollywood." "I have a lot of affection for '50's and '60's-based design. The '60's California hot rod culture is my favorite. Ed 'Big Daddy' Roth. Rat Fink. That was some of the coolest shit in the world. I'm a huge 'Big Daddy' Roth fan. I just love that stuff."

"But my plans are to do a tribute to the old B-movie posters of the '50's and '60's. Horror. Sci-Fi. Women in prison films and my personal favorite: teenage exploitation. These original paintings will be based on a contemporary theme while still retaining all the base el-



ements of the era. Design, type font, typography, etc. I have an original poster from the 1957 flick *REFORM SCHOOL GIRLS* hanging in my studio. If kids were nearly like the way they were portrayed in the films of the fifties, I'm surprised I was ever born. Or at least, I should have

"This business is a circus. You have to be a little bit Barnum and Bailey."

27 brothers and sisters and a back yard filled with wrecked hot rods. The first painting of the series that I already have sketched up is for Rachael Robbins after her ego character 'Blondie'. She's seen the sketches and we'll be moving ahead with that one this fall. I've also shot Lindsay DeVaul and Roseanne together as prom queen and cheerleader for a piece titled 'Cut-Offs at Central High.' Other titles include 'Dragstrip Drag Queens' and 'Texas Trailer Trash Tramps.'

There is an inevitable direction for all this, and this is hardly the first time a popular artist has dabbled in other ventures. (Although a rather extreme example of "mixed medium,") "It's writing my first screenplay that has me really hyped right now. I've done some writing in the past such as covering events for different magazines to the lowly tag lines for ad copy. But it's the screenplay that always intrigued me. For the best possible idea I stuck with what I know best. The story is based on the images from my 'Blonde & Gagged' series. It started out as your basic 'Milkrunning loose in Los Angeles' piece, but that evolved into what artists will do and of what lengths they will go to achieve fame. It runs around the art gallery and convention circuit with pen-up models and fetish parties. A lot of the more lighthearted incidents were taken from past years on the road. You could state a case for much of this being semi-autobiographical—without the serial killer, of course. Girls and artists involved with a murder mystery surrounded by a lot of dark humor. The 8-month bread and butter thing. A lot of opportunity for actresses, a low production cost; I basically wrote it with [those things] in mind. One of the main characters was written specifically for Josie Cotton Lanes. If you've ever spent any amount of time around her, you know she's a character. I finished it, I guess, around the beginning of the year. The first rough draft, anyway—which was a couple of hundred pages. I was surprised at how lengthy it got. I sent it out to a few people. Actresses, artists and a few people who have no idea about my kind of work, and it's gotten really good reviews. It needs to be 'weeded' obviously, but it's something I really want to take my time on. So I'll probably pick it up this fall, redo the parts that were bad, and start shopping it around."

There's not too much that can stop Nester now. His work will continue to be seen in ever-expanding circles. Gallery showings and Glamourcon booths will always be in his future, as will be comic book and magazine covers in store promotions, CD artwork—basically anything that interests him. What will set him apart from the rest, however, will be the same things that always allowed him to stand out: his quest for originality, and his passionate, hyper-real women.

"Why do what everyone else is doing? Once your talent base is established, the easiness of marketing. Sometimes I hate to think like that, using gimmicks or themes. I'd like to think I still have some integrity left to my craft. But I've eaten out of dumpsters. I've lived in my car. I just got lucky. I took what I do best and I found a market that supported it. From there, I took the all-American girl and tied her up in black tape, and was recognized. I'm now afforded the opportunity to go in any direction I want."

For more information about Dave and his Models visit him on the web at www.wickedcitystudios.com



Inside the beautifully DORIAN

Dorian Cleavenger lives in a very dark world. It's not just Gothic; it's dangerous, filled with hard shadows and beautiful women. His hormones, however, are not the ones in danger. More accurately, it's the viewer who is in trouble.

The women in Cleavenger's paintings are night creatures. More than "mere" vampires, they are demons, some with wings, some with scales. Some may be posing—like Pickman's Model in the famed Lovecraft story—in Hell itself.

"Growing up as a child I always enjoyed the darker side of things, monsters,



By
Mike
Watt

dark world of artist

CLEAVENGER





demons and sci-fi." Cleavenger says, "It allows [me] a richer field of creativity. Also, the perception of what is evil and good is strictly a matter of perspective. I try to blend the two so it's not quite clear which is which. To me women are very strong and too often depicted as 'victims.' There are many artists who do the pin-up style and do it well, so I look for a void in the art field and try to fill it."

The key to his art, Cleavenger says, is that each piece is a matter of point-of-view. At first glance... it would seem that he melded a model with a monstrous lizard creature in his dark picture "The Night Crawler." "I look at it as what would the lizard think about, having a human head? It probably wouldn't be too happy either. I try to open people's thoughts to accommodate beauty in all life forms and not just humans. Some of my favorites are the Old Masters and the Victorian painters, they seemed to have captured an essence of life that is somewhat magical

demonic fantasy being." The plus side of working with models is that you have control over poses and lighting, the down side is that some of them aren't crazy about what I do with them, so it may hamper some creativity. I work several ways with models with reference, and out of my head. It depends on the direction of a painting."

His fanbase is growing larger by the day. But a working artist needs an income so that they may continue their art. Oftentimes this results in his painting other people's creations, usually covers for some of the more popular comic books. Cleavenger has created his own renditions of Vampirella and the pin up queen herself, Bettie Page. While ladies such as these have their place in the images of Cleavenger's world, they are, of course, not of his world. So a mental shift is required. "You have to research what has been done with a character so as not to duplicate it or accidentally come close to an existing image. It can be difficult due

"I always enjoyed the darker side of things.... there are many artists who do the pin-up style.... I look for a void in the art field and try to fill it."

and rarely duplicated. As far as my influences, it would have to be nature as a whole, basically everything that has existed and does exist."

A New Jersey native, Cleavenger worked out of Pittsburgh for some time. He studied at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, thinking he needed some sort of educational "justification" for his craft. While it did help him get into the world of commercial art, it was his horrific images that got him attention. So much so he has had gallery showings in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, and has sold paintings not only in his home country, but in Europe and Asia as well.

As popular as his work has become over the last few years, his subject matter isn't for all tastes. Many of the images: virtually him with the threat of impending violence and exotic sexuality. But, surprisingly enough Cleavenger noted, he hasn't received much negative feedback over the images he chooses to paint, though there have been occasions where the live models he uses have tried to balk against being transformed into a

to the amount of variations out there. Usually comic heroines are presented as voluptuous and powerful so I try to show them a little more feminine and 'real.' The interior pages of a comic have to be looked at as storyboard: where every adjacent image is as important as the image you are viewing. In cover art or single image art, it needs to tell a story by itself in order to keep the viewer's interest."

While fantasy art will never go out of style, it's not as popular as it was only ten years ago. Fans like a bit of bite in their art these days. Maybe it has something to do with the overly cynical times, causing younger fans to feel out of touch with the real world. Whatever the reason, Cleavenger's dark realms appeal to those who love the things which lurk in the shadows of the women who can tear them apart with a kiss.

Dorian Cleavenger has two books of art on the market right now, with a third on the way. Fans can visit him on the web at www.dorianart.com

A conversation with one of the most ground

TRINA R

CHOICES

The Choice Is Yours



Barbie FASHION



As long as she can remember, comic books have been in Trina Robbins's blood.

"My school teacher mother taught me to read at the age of four and I immediately became an omnivorous reader. I read all the books in the house, the backs of cereal boxes on the kitchen table—and comics. Meanwhile, there I was, drawing pictures for as long as I could hold a crayon. I used to fold an 8x11 piece of paper in two, and have four pages to draw on. People would look at my drawings and ask me what they were about. Now, they weren't really about anything, but to make the people happy, I'd make up stories about the drawings. If these weren't proto-comics, I don't know what else I had forward to art school and they're trying to tell me that Art (with a capital A) is well said abstract and I just wanna draw little pictures of people on paper. So, Art school and I parted ways. Finally in the mid-60s, I (and allons of hippies and college students) got turned on to Marvel Comics, and it was 'like, wow, man. Those dudes [who drew stuff like Doctor Strange or Thor, two of my faves] must be acid [but they weren't]!'" And I finally realized that my little drawings of people on paper were comic!"

Inspired by the non-Marvel heads, Robbins returned to her beloved comic though without much success. The major companies weren't interested in hiring a female writer or artist. Undaunted, Robbins turned her attention to the then-thriving world of underground cartooning, joining the ranks of Robert Crumb, Vaughn Bodé, and Gilbert Shelton. The underground artists—before the medium was even described as "underground"—were of an angry young generation, publishing their own books, addressing issues the mainstream books would not—with a hippie's point of view, singeing the proles of drug use and sex. To further differentiate the medium from the popular super hero lines, the creators and publishers took to spelling the word "comic" or "comix." Robbins wrote and drew her stories from the only point of view she had: a woman's. Her feminist-friendly stories spoke to readers of both genders, but really hit home with the newly re-burgeoning Women's Liber-

ation Movement. One of her stories, "Sandy Comes Out," which appeared in *Wimmen's Comics* #2, may very well have been the first comic story about a lesbian. From then on, she became one of the first successful female underground cartoonists.

"Me, a successful female underground cartoonist? I don't think so," Robbins says. "The [underground] boys didn't want me in their clubs, which meant they didn't invite me into their books, so I had to do it myself, or with the only other woman in San Francisco drawing comics at that time [1970 and '71], Willy Mendes. Lucky for us, the 'comic' publishers weren't as sexist as the guy cartoonists and they published our comix because they knew it would sell."

"[My first big splash in the comics world] was probably *If Ain't Me, Babe*, the first all-woman comic anthology in 1970. Well, on second thought, maybe not. It made a splash with women, but women were hardly part of the comic world [except for wives and girlfriends]. were they? I don't know if any of my comix made a splash in the comic world. The world of comic readers, maybe, but not the comic world. Then in 1972, the *Wimmen's Comics Collective* was formed, and suddenly there were more women drawing comic and the number began growing ever since. I never established myself in the Boy's Club. And I still haven't. Sure, the guy cartoonists or conventions will be friendly and say hello, but you can tell they don't think of me as an equal. With a few exceptions: like Barry Mandel and Jim Valentino of Image [and guys like my kind hearted boyfriend] who have had enough faith in my newest comic, *GoGift*. To publish, editors are not receptive to my proposals and I think they turn pale when they see me coming."

Today, comic readers are a bit more broad-minded (though judging from the rampant sexual stereotyping of women in mainstream books, maybe only a bit more). There are more women working in the industry today than ever before. But they still haven't received the high-profiles of their male counterparts. A few years ago, Heidi MacDonald founded the organization *Friends of Lulu* to ad-

-breaking female underground cartoonists

ROBBINS

by Mike Watt

des the ongoing need for a collective to address the needs of women cartoonists and Robbins was one of the charter members. "It's a noncommercial, not international organization and includes the voices of many people—men and women—who share the same goals."

Robbins insists that female voices in the comics world are getting stronger every day. "I don't have the energy to attempt counting how many women are drawing comics today, because new ones enter the field every day. I try to deal with that in my newest book, *The Great Women Cartoonists* [Norton, Gup-16 November 2001]."

As Robbins's popularity grew, small offers began to trickle in from the big two. Marvel and DC Robbins wrote storylines for the official Marvel Barbie comic. While the popular Barbie doll has been attacked repeatedly in the past for giving young girls an improper image of the body politic, Robbins found the comic file to be quite versatile. She used the comic to tell positive and non-violent stories about such topics as anorexia and growing old. For DC, Robbins worked on one of the longest-standing images of Women's Liberation in history: Wonder Woman.

"But I'm terribly proud of the Wonder Woman graphic novel I wrote and Colleen Doran drew, *The Once and Future Story*, which was about spousal abuse. I'm not so happy with the four-part mini-series I drew in the '80s, because at that time I was too insecure to think I could write it so they got me a writer whom I was not particularly happy with. When I look back on that, all I can see is how I'd do it differently today if I could write it. I've always wanted to do Wonder Woman [again] and know exactly how I'd write her; I would love to write her again now, should the current creators get hit by a truck, except I've given up hope of DC ever letting me."

Because of her work in the women's liberation movement within the world of comics, Robbins has become a superheroine in her own right, as well as a respected voice. Last year a German art museum hosted Robbins's "From Girls to Girls" exhibit, portraying the history of women's work in comics, comic and lit-

erature. "It was great," Robbins says of the exhibit.

Right now, Robbins is working on a new series for Image Comics' *GO! Girl*, serving as the writer to Anne Timmons art. "The heroine is a teenage girl whose mom was a superheroine in the '70s, but stopped flying because her husband fell in love with her. Now her mom's ability to fly has been passed on to her. She's a normal, if really cute, teenager who doesn't have X-ray vision, bullets don't bounce off her so she has to learn how to be a superheroine. We get great response—girls and guys too, like our book, but the retailers either won't carry it or under-order it because it's not a violent superhero book and none of the female characters have big boobs." And so it goes.

"I'm quite happy with almost all the books I've written," Robbins says. "Of course projects I'm proudest of my pro-choice anthology, *Choices*, co-published by me and Lu Schlier and edited by me, with profits going to NOW. We had decided to self-publish it after it was rejected by two comic publishers. I'm also immensely proud of *Stop AIDS USA: an AIDS benefit anthology* co-edited by me, Robert Trujillo (editor of *Gay Comics*) and Bill Sienkiewicz."

"As for the current state of comic art that I like, umm, Gee, if they're mainstream and I like them, they usually get称赞ed real quick like *Yeah!* by Peter Bagge and Gilbert Hernández. In the indies I love Julie Doucet (*Dark Helfie*) and Dame Darcy (*Meet Coke*). Inc. Shonnon's adaptation of the *Trojan War* is fantastic! Not only is he a great artist, but his research is so good, and he makes you feel that this is what it looked like, this is how the characters looked. He does this one great thing: when he draws the women, they have hairy armpits! Nobody in any other comic has ever drawn women with hairy armpits! I mean like Sheena, *Queen of the Jungle*, showed her armpits there in her treehouse? I'm getting carried away here, but still, but maybe you have to be a woman to understand how cool I think that is."

Trina has a website at www.trinobans.com.



JULIE BELL



One of the top photo-realists
in the States brings her
sensual, ethereal blend of
science fiction and fantasy

By Mike Watt

She's a mom, a model, a bodybuilder, and one of the top fantasy artists in the United States. Her art works are virtually a staple among fans of sorceresses, warrior women, mythological creatures, and wondrous dragons. Even those with only a passing interest in the fantasy genre have seen her work in the annual calendars that she puts out with her husband, artist Boris Vallejo. Bookstores may have even seen their art books—decorating end caps in chains across the country.

Julie Bell is best known, however, for her stylistic trademark of fusing flesh with chrome, fantasy worlds filled with metallic creatures, and sexy cyborgs. The meshing of skin and metal is a distinctive touch.

"The metal flesh look grew out of a time when I was just starting to paint and experimenting with different things. A girl came to my studio to model for a record company handling the band Great White, who, at the time, was looking for a cover for an upcoming album. She wanted to promote herself as a model and I

wanted to promote myself as an artist, so I did the painting of the girl riding the metal shock. But they had already used a painting for the cover by the time I had finished—but I didn't know that, they did like it though. That painting was very successful for me.

"One of the things that came out of it was the publisher for Paper Tiger, who'd been doing Vallejo's books for a long time, saw that painting, and said 'I think it would be great if you took this technique of what you're doing here, expand it, and let's make a book. We'll use the metal imagery as a theme.' He felt that having a theme was a really helpful thing for making a book. So I thought, 'Cool.' What would happen in the meantime, I would get better at the technique. The book would be being The Julie Bell Portfolio."

The blend of science fiction and fantasy is, of course, a staple design for art in both genres. But what makes Bell's style so distinctive is that the metal flesh looks like a cross between chrome and pure silver. The metal seems to come to shimmering life on her



canvas. Overheard of a convention, one critic mentioned he was amazed he couldn't see his face reflected in the armor of a metal woman. That is a testament to Bell's talent.

"When I first started doing it, I wasn't sure what kind of look I was going for. I didn't have any real good metal objects around to work from, but the mall had these metal garbage cans, and I asked if we could borrow one. So my son and I took it, laid it down, and he sat on it, pretended it was the shark so that I could get an idea of how the reflections went, that sort of thing. So that garbage can kind of established the look of the hardness and shine of the metal," Bell continues. "I don't use it as much now because I've been exploring other things. I've gotten to where I like to see it combined. I don't like to see just [the metal], it's too much, too far removed from reality. I think the [human] body is really beautiful, and faces are really beautiful. I'd rather see a real face than a metal face. I'd rather see her real face. I use it more as a tool than for whenever I feel like using it."

Like Vallejo, Bell is a photo-realistic painter who works in oil on canvas. The oil allows her to create a lifelike image imposed over an alien background. "Even before I started painting, that was the kind of thing I was attracted to. What I really liked was surrealistic art. The thing I liked about it was that it looked realistic at first glance, but then it was made into an other-worldly kind of piece. We like to combine the photo-realistic quality with a more random quality. If you look at the backgrounds, and the sky, and the ground in the paintings, different things like that, you'll see a certain randomness that we allowed to happen with the paint. And it's that mixture that engages the viewer's imagination and allows them to complete the picture. If you had the whole thing captured in a photograph, you wouldn't get the same response, because a person doesn't have any involvement in creating a photograph."

"What I like to see in art is the skill, and the understanding of color and form. I like to see a combination—when you [mingle] the photo-realistic technique with a graphic design, the way you would see it in an Art Nouveau type of thing, when they have a lot of real pretty patterns and designs going around, it gives it a more decorative look, but it still has the skill of photo-realism."

According to Bell, it was Vallejo who taught her to paint. "I didn't really know how to use paint when I first met him. I had done a few things, but I had worked in acrylic and water colors, and had never really tried oil. I was scared of oil. When I was a kid, my mother had gotten me some oil paints and I did a few things, but she was telling me to use it really thick. It







Jude
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"I don't like to see things where someone is being hurt... I see the art that Boris and I do as a statement of feminine power."

just seemed really hard to control the way the colors would work. [One day] I watched Boris in the studio as he worked with the oil. [and] I saw how he put the colors down and blended them—I thought, 'Okay, cool, now I have to do that!' That's how it happened. I know that anytime I'm in a jam, I can ask him for help. In my early days of painting, it was just wonderful. I had all this confidence and didn't have to worry about getting caught in a corner and not knowing what to do with the paint. I just figured, okay, just go for it. And if it wasn't working, I could ask him what to do here, and he could give me a way out.

"It works out really nice. We both think alike. And we have similar things we want to say with our art. We both angle towards it. I like to see that when they're sitting next to each other and you can see the feeling that goes into each piece. Right now, Boris and I are finishing the stuff for the 2003 Calendar for Workman's. He's [put out a] calendar for twenty-something years. And a few years ago, they had us start doing the calendar together. I'll do half the pieces, and he'll do half, then we'll both do one piece together."

Bell first met Volpe after she won a bodybuilding contest. "The guy who had promoted the contest suggested to Boris that he use me as a model," she tells me. Judging from the photos of the artist on her site, she is very physically fit, which makes her highly recognizable when she poses for Volpe's paintings.

"I'd always been an athletic person. I'd done a lot of gymnastics and dancing, that sort of thing. I wanted to get back into shape after I'd had my two kids, so I started doing aerobics and that sort of thing. I got into the whole feeling of being able to do it at home, while I took care of my kids, and it just kind of grew. Got into the magazines for bodybuilding, and I started competing—it just fits in with my personality. I'm a competitive person myself. I

enjoy having goals and something to shoot for. I don't do it any more and I don't like the direction that body building has gone in—I'm not happy with the steroids and the artificialness of it. That's not any accomplishment. I like to see skill.

Just as Bell makes appearances in Volpe's paintings, so too does Volpe pop up in her own work. "We really understand what the other person's looking for. So it's the easiest thing in the world." Not just from a practical standpoint: modeling for each other is something they both enjoy as well.

"Just the fact that I'm posing in a lot of his paintings, my personality influences the direction of the painting," Bell says. "When you have a model, whoever it is, his or her style is going to come through, unless you really lie the painting down, and that's not a good thing to do. If you let the painting have its own say, then that model's personality will shine through."

Sometimes, the necessity of the business makes using a live model impossible, but, like most artists, Bell prefers to work off of a live model rather than a posed photograph sent by an agency. "We shoot our own pictures of models. At this point, we're using digital cameras, but if there's any processing to be done, we do our own. It makes a big difference. Occasionally we've had to work with photos—if we had to do a painting of someone for a movie or something, they aren't going to fly the actors here, they'll just send pictures. It's tricky to do it that way, but we can do it."

One question often asked of artists is, what comes first? Do artists have the idea first and then find the right model for the job, or does the model come and through the posing does the idea come to life? "It always evolves," Bell says. "I don't care if you do have the images in your mind. These paintings, man, you can't tell them what to do. You have to let them be your partner. Some-

Bell Works in oil
on canvas, like
her husband,
Boris Vallejo.



times we'll have a specific sketch and we'll have the model pose in a specific way. But other times we'll just shoot pictures and allow ourselves to be inspired by the pictures."

In this scope-goat-hungry society, artists are often targeted—along with filmmakers and musicians—for violence perpetrated in real life. Volpe and Bell's art, for the most part, can be held above moral criticism. The images in their paintings often depict action without violence, sensuality and nudity without graphic sexual content. Bell's work in particular has a mythical quality that aims to transcend base violent or sexual emotions.

"I see art where I think, 'Oh brother, why did they do that?' I don't like to see art that goes against my basic principals as a human being," says Bell. "I don't like to see things where someone is being hurt or degraded in any way. If someone asks me to do a painting of someone being hurt—even if they were going to pay me a lot of money—I wouldn't do it. I see the art that bathes both and I do as a feminist statement of feminine power. We certainly don't put women in any sort of situation where they're being dominated or abused in any way. We have the women as powerful characters in our paintings. No one's come up to me and said, 'You're exploiting women.' At one time there was a woman at *Ms.* magazine—I don't know what happened to this—but she was planning an article about how women look at my paintings and see something that empowers them."

Bell can't bring herself to choose a favorite influencing artist—"Art is everywhere. It's pointless to even go there!"—nor will she discuss a favorite piece of her own. "That's one of those questions that I just won't answer. It would be like you asking me to choose my favorite child or pet. There are just some things you can't do. It's not true. You can't really say 'This is my favorite.' Can you say 'This is my favorite song of my whole life?' It's going to change. These are some things that I like about some paintings, some things I don't like about them. But there is no one painting that would really represent me."

But she is appreciative of her fans. "It's great with the internet: we get a lot of really nice letters. And a lot of great ideas—people are always letting us know what they'd like to see. It's really great to be able to have constant communication with fans."

And what advice does the couple have for all the hopeful artists? "We get that question almost every day on the internet! It's not a real glamorous answer. It's all about working hard and humbling yourself so that you are open to learning. I guess the biggest stumbling block that any artist in any medium will encounter is the ego. You have so much of yourself tied up in what you're producing, whether it's music or painting or writing or whatever. You have to humble yourself and be willing to accept criticism, even from people you don't consider to be experts. Everybody's going to see it, you know. Go to school. We definitely recommend that people go to school and get things out there. Keep on going. Whatever stumbling blocks you come across, instead of thinking of them as something trying to stop you, think of them as an opportunity to learn whatever it takes to get past that block."

Right now, Bell and Volpe are swamped with work—the true sign of a successful artist. "The newest book we have coming out is called *The Sketch Book*, which is a collection of drawings, and that's kind of neat, because it shows the development of some of the pieces. It has some finished drawings in there also. We have a new technique book planned in the near future. Everyone's been asking us for that, so that'll be really fun. Mostly we're staying busy, doing things for the Franklin Mint, which we enjoy. Overseeing the sculptures. Nothing gets to be done unless we approve it, so the sculptures are really good."

For more information about the work of Julie Bell go to www.belljulie.com □





INTERVIEW BY MIKE WATT

Bursting onto the scene, this talented comic book multi-tasker creates female heroines who are both sexy and tough.



RICHARD MOORE

He's got the magic name: Alan Moore (*Watchmen*, *Promethea*, *Terry Moore (Strangers in Paradise)*) and now Richard Moore has burst onto the comic scene with his whimsical *Boneyard*.

If you're not familiar with Richard Moore's work, you don't know what you're missing. *Boneyard* is a fast-paced, fall-down funny story about a young man who inherits an old cemetery—as well as all it's ghoulish occupants—including a hand-drinking skeleton, a bug-eyed demon, and a beautiful vampire named Abby.

But *Boneyard* is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Moore's talents. He's also the creator of an off-beat western/fantasy called *Far West*, which has proven to be endlessly imaginative and has received quite the cult following.

Femme Fatales readers especially would love Moore's female

characters—across the board, his heroines are tough and sexy—they can take care of themselves and they're not afraid to show a little skin.

Take *Boneyard*'s Abby, for instance. She's a real stunner, as any good vampire should be. Plus, she has a great sense of humor as well as great chemistry with Paul, the new owner of the haunted cemetery. "Abby has been in three projects that I worked on before," Moore says. "She was just a character I'd always liked, and when the *Boneyard* came up, I just had to put her in there. She got a little more refined here. I gave her a bit more background. Some of the others, Nessie the [outrageous] swamp creature, have been various incarnations in things I'd done before. Some thing with some of the other ones. And all sorts of faces that I'd liked before found

BONEYARD

BY RICHARD MOORE



"ONE OF THE PROBLEMS I HAVE HAD WITH FANTASY, AS WELL AS COMICS IN GENERAL," SAID MOORE, "IS THAT I DON'T LIKE CHARACTERS TO JUST ZAP THEIR WAY OUT OF A [SITUATION]."

get her off once, she realized even she wasn't powerful enough to stop them all. So she had to go into hiding. She divested herself of all her powers and deposited them in one central location, because it was her power that her enemies were using to track her; a homing beacon basically. So she left all her powers and memories—basically her entire personality—all tied up in this one bundle in this one place. Then she cast an amnesia spell on herself, and wandered the country for about a hundred years, not knowing who she was or what was going on. A hundred years later, in our present, the other end of the spell licks in, and she starts wandering back across the country, not knowing why. To this place where her powers have been waiting for her for the past hundred years, hoping that her enemies will have lost her smell, or lost interest, or assumed that she was dead. Her familiar is a chimp shifter whose name is "Wulf," which is short for *Bacchus*, and he's been watching over her powers all this time, assuming that she will just assume the monkey and take up where she left off. But when he tells her what she used to be, that she was this horrible evil creature, she won't have part of it. She's developed a new personality for herself over the past hundred years. And having tipped off her old enemies that she's still alive, they're once again after her, but she can't tap those massive powers of hers without risking turning back into what she used to be. So she's now on the run, but she doesn't have these huge powers to defend herself.

"One of the problems I have had with fantasy, as well as comics in general, is that I don't like characters to just zap their way out of a problem. You know, one bolt of energy and everything's fine. The fun thing with *Deja Vu* is that she has to think her way out of problems. She could just zap her way out, but it would mean becoming everything she hates. So it's always hanging over her head. It's her *Sword of Damocles*.—Do I or don't I? It's an interesting personality struggle for her, resisting temptation, the old question of absolute power corrupting absolutely."

Moore's first off of *independence*, however, came from *Far West*. The central characters in *Far West* is an elfin bounty hunter named Meg and her sidekick, a talking bear named Phil. Though the trappings of this bear a striking resemblance to our patriotic America, Meg's *Old West* is not our *Old West*. Certainly John Wayne wouldn't cotton to a town full of faeries. Oddly enough, despite the panels filled with detail and strange, whimsical characters, Moore is neither a fan of fantasy or westerns.

"Except for *Tolkien* and *Lord of the Rings*, I really don't like most fantasy characters, elves or dragons, or that kind of thing. They just seem a little contrived. [As I've said], my biggest problem with fantasy is when you have characters like wizards, anything can happen. No matter what problem they get involved in, they can just whip out a spell and get themselves out of a jam. That just seemed like a

their way into the Boneyard."

As of yet, *Boneyard* readers haven't learned too much about Abby. That will probably change quite soon, as Moore is notorious for giving his characters extensive backstory. Take, for instance, his *Radio Comics* series *Deja Vu*.

"*Deja Vu* is probably my earliest comic title," says Moore. "It was the first one I ever tried to put together, back when I was working at a bookstore. I'd literally never picked up a pen and ink before. But I just liked the story enough, as did my editor at *Radio*, who told me to just go ahead and do it. [But] it's caused a great deal of confusion among readers. What makes her confusing is that *Deja Vu* probably has the most complicated backstory I've ever written. But in a short run you don't have a lot of time for exposition, so what we did was we put a blurb on the inside cover to explain her backstory. The problem was, they're a very small company over at *Radio*, and there was some miscommunication and they forgot to run the backstory. Everyone kept e-mailing me saying, 'What is happening? Who is this character? What is her name?' And people also make the mistake of thinking that this is a vampire story. She's actually a witch, but it just so happens that the characters she interacts with in the first story are happen to be vampires. But it's not a vampire storyline."

"About 2000 years ago, *Deja Vu* was basically the most powerful witch on the planet. She was also extremely hateful and evil and just did horrible things. She would topple entire governments and start wars just for the fun of it, and wreaked havoc all through history. Unfortunately she earned herself so many enemies that were all out to



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A woman with short, dark hair and a shaved head is standing in a doorway. She is wearing a pink long-sleeved top and a black skirt. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some purple and blue lights. The doorway is framed by pinkish-purple curtains.

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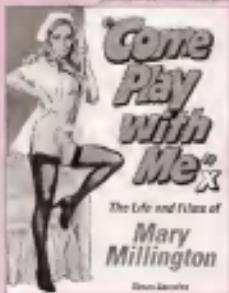


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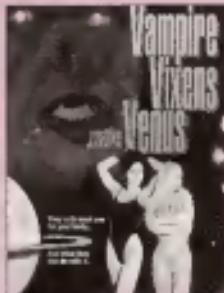
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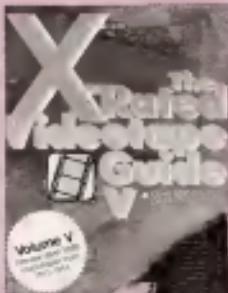
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LETTERS

FOREVER IRVIN!

Just wanted to let you know how pleased I was to open your BVLN issue (10-5) and discover articles on not only my goddess, but also Julie Brown and Sam Irvin. Great photos! And the story of Irvin's career made me want to go out and rent every single film he's done.

Loved GUILTY AS CHARGED, KISS OF A STRANGER and ACTING ON IMPULSE—still looking for OUT THERE and the OBLIVION movies.

I was also beyond thrilled with Denice Duff's great photos of Irvin's classic actresses. Would love to see more photos like that (present day) in the future. FF writer Jason Paul Collum did an amazing retrospective (I only wish his Julie Brown intro would have been a little longer). Otherwise, the issue is a definite keeper! I'm looking forward to more retros. Oh, and I really like the new look of the mag too!

Matt King
via email



FF writer Jason Paul Collum (center) is flanked by his loves (l-R) Marlene Vendor, Cassandra (Elise) Petersen, Julie Brown, Staci Stevens, Sam Irvin, Brinke Stevens and Mary Woronov. Collum reported, "I was in absolute heaven the entire day. To be around the same people who inspire me is indescribable. Photo: Denice Duff was amazing!"

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